BRIDGES AND BARRIERS 2010

Yukon experiences with poverty, social exclusion and inclusion

Yukon
Health and Social Services

This report was written by Rachel Westfall, Senior Statistician, Yukon Bureau of Statistics, on behalf of the Office of Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, Department of Health and Social Services.

For more information, contact: ybsinfo@gov.yk.ca

Yukon Bureau of Statistics
December, 2010

Bridges and Barriers 2010
Yukon experiences with poverty, social exclusion and inclusion

Acknowledgements

The success of this report is credited to all the individuals who took part in our public workshops. Some of these individuals courageously shared their personal experiences with social exclusion or poverty. Others shared the general observations they have made while working as non-profit or government-based service providers. All of these individuals worked together to create a safe atmosphere in which stories could be told and documented without judgment.

Members of the Interdepartmental Steering Committee for Social Inclusion worked with Government of Yukon's Staff Development Branch to identify conceptual themes and develop the methodology for facilitating the workshops. We are grateful to everyone who participated in this background work, which helped to bring this project to fruition.

We would like to thank Mal Malloch for facilitating the workshops, and for compiling the extensive hand-written notes that were generated by numerous working groups. In addition, the note-takers played an essential part in making the workshops a success.

Mal Malloch (Malloch Consulting Services) and Michael McCann (Health and Social Services) developed and applied the preliminary coding framework for analyzing the stories. Rachel Westfall (Yukon Bureau of Statistics) conducted the detailed coding and analysis, then prepared this report.

Table of Contents

Foreword 1

Executive Summary 3

1. Introduction 5

2. Methodology 5

3. A picture of social exclusion 8
- 3.1 Definitions 9
- 3.2 Coinciding themes 10
- 3.3 Different voices 11

4. What we heard from the public 12
- 4.1 Access to services 13
- 4.2 Disability 14
- 4.3 Housing 15
- 4.4 Dignity 16
- 4.5 Support networks 16
- 4.6 Health, mental health and addictions 17
- 4.7 Employment 17
- 4.8 Cycle of poverty 18
- 4.9 Threats to safety 18
- 4.10 Community politics and racism 19
- 4.11 Transportation and isolation 19
- 4.12 Education 20
- 4.13 Recreation 20
- 4.14 Justice system 20
- 4.15 Child care 20

5. What we heard from the NGO community 21
- 5.1 Access to services 22
- 5.2 Disability 23
- 5.3 Housing 23
- 5.4 Dignity 24
- 5.5 Support networks 24
- 5.6 Health, mental health and addictions 24
- 5.7 Employment 25
- 5.8 Cycle of poverty 25
- 5.9 Threats to safety 25
- 5.10 Community politics and racism 25
- 5.11 Transportation and isolation 26
- 5.12 Education 26
- 5.13 Recreation 26
- 5.14 Justice system 27
- 5.15 Child care 27

6. What we heard from government front-line workers **28**
- 6.1 Access to services 29
- 6.2 Disability 30
- 6.3 Housing 30
- 6.4 Dignity 30
- 6.5 Support networks 31
- 6.6 Health, mental health and addictions 31
- 6.7 Employment 32
- 6.8 Cycle of poverty 32
- 6.9 Threats to safety 32
- 6.10 Community politics and racism 32
- 6.11 Transportation and isolation 33
- 6.12 Education 33
- 6.13 Recreation 34
- 6.14 Justice system 34
- 6.15 Child care 34

7. Conclusions **35**
- 7.1 Access to services can be impeded by systemic barriers. 35
- 7.2 Housing is an important and complex issue 36
- 7.3 Transportation matters. 36
- 7.4 Location matters. 37
- 7.5 An inclusive approach makes a difference. 37
- 7.6 Next steps 37

Appendix 1. Schedule of public meetings **39**

Appendix 2. Workshop participants **40**

Appendix 3. Guidelines for recording stories **41**

Appendix 4. Story Recording Sheet **42**

Appendix 5. Steps for small groups **43**

Appendix 6. Coinciding themes **44**

Foreword

Bridges and Barriers 2010

Yukon experiences with poverty, social exclusion and inclusion

I am pleased to present *Bridges and Barriers 2010*, a report on what we heard during the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Workshop and community tours that were held in April and May of 2010 and provided us with the opportunity to speak with community members and service providers about what worked and what did not work so well.

This report provides us with critical information about the personal circumstances and challenges facing a number of people in our community.

Community members and front-line service workers volunteered to share their stories. They brought us into their lives and shared with us their hopes, fears and dreams. This report provides an in-depth look at the factors that can lead to feelings of social exclusion, the bridges that help people access services, and the barriers that deny access.

We learned that poverty and social exclusion aren't just about money. Financial stability was an issue, but community members also wanted to feel included, respected and valued. These basic needs have to be addressed. Government and non-governmental agencies knew the two were linked but until now there was no concrete information upon which to base program and policy decisions.

The hard-truth accounts and observations reported here provide invaluable, concrete evidence that social inclusion issues and support needs are varied, and that they require a collaborative approach if we are to see change. This information will help pave the way to better recognition and understanding of the effects of social exclusion.

Citizens who feel respected and valued contribute positively to their society. Many of the observations that participants shared in this report reveal a desire to participate more fully in the community. Having fully engaged citizens enriches all our lives.

The *Bridges and Barriers 2010* report is a tool for learning and understanding. With what we have learned here, we can approach further planning with a better sense of context, and a clearer idea of the appropriate action. We are grateful to all the participants: citizens from Yukon communities, front-line workers and Whitehorse public. Their input has been invaluable and is appreciated.

Stuart J. Whitley
Deputy Minister, Health and Social Services

Executive Summary

This report is one of a series of several reports that document social exclusion and poverty in Yukon. It provides us with a qualitative glimpse into the experiences of some of society's most vulnerable members, as well as the professional observations of a wide range of service providers.

The information contained in this report will be used in part to inform a social inclusion and poverty reduction strategy for the territory.

Facilitated workshops on the subject of social exclusion and poverty were held in Yukon communities between April and June, 2010. Participants included:

- ⇨ Government employees who provide services to the public;
- ⇨ Representatives from service-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and
- ⇨ Members of the public.

The purpose of these workshops was to gather and share qualitative information on people's experiences with poverty and social exclusion. We asked participants to share their stories, highlighting what helped (bridges) and what didn't (barriers). Members of the public shared their personal stories, while most service providers talked about the observations they had made over the years they had worked with vulnerable members of the public.

The notes taken at the workshops were thematically analyzed. One major theme was identified — ***access to services*** — along with 18 other prevalent, wide-ranging themes. In order of frequency with which they came up, the themes included:

1. Access to services
2. Housing
3. Disability
4. Transportation
5. Addictions
6. Education
7. Dignity
8. Support networks
9. Employment
10. Threats to safety
11. Recreation
12. Community politics
13. Cycle of poverty
14. Health
15. Isolation
16. Mental health
17. Justice system
18. Racism
19. Child care

There were several key findings. First, we heard that ***systemic barriers can impede access to services.*** Some people said they felt they had to fight to access the services they needed. Other times, they said they didn't know where to go for help, or didn't know if the services they needed were available at all. A few people suggested that it would be helpful to have an information booklet, advocate or guide to help them navigate the system.

Meanwhile, NGO representatives and government front-line workers spoke broadly about how the centralization of services in Whitehorse, while efficient in many ways, has created a systemic barrier that impacts rural residents more heavily than urban residents. They mentioned other barriers that impede access to services, including the inadequacy of some existing financial supports for low-income households, physical barriers that make it difficult for physically disabled clients to access service agencies and public facilities, and the challenge of providing services to clients with no home phone or fixed address.

Second, we heard that ***housing is an important and complex issue***. Members of the public, NGO representatives and government front-line workers all talked about a number of issues that made it hard for people to find adequate, affordable housing.

While many of the speakers made it clear that housing is an important issue, it was also apparent that there is no simple solution. The speakers called for solutions that ranged between:

- ⇨ Investment in more social housing;
- ⇨ Investment in supported housing;
- ⇨ Legislative reform (*Landlord Tenant Act*); and
- ⇨ A more user-friendly, consistent, and readily accessible network of social services.

Third, we heard that ***transportation and location matter***. We heard that transportation challenges have the greatest impact on those who are most easily marginalized, such as people with low incomes, people with disabilities, people living in isolated regions and people with weak social networks. Public transit plays an essential role in providing equitable access to goods, services and public facilities for people from all sectors of society.

Many of the speakers talked about the limitations of public transit in Whitehorse, as well as its absence in smaller Yukon communities. We heard that further investment in public transit would help to overcome the chronic deprivation, under-service and social isolation suffered by the most easily marginalized members of our population.

The workshop participants told us that compared to Whitehorse, the smaller communities are much more heavily impacted by the scarcity of local services, and as a result, the smaller communities are affected by the high cost or unavailability of transportation. As well as impeding access to services, the isolation of small communities appeared to negatively impact people's recreation and education opportunities.

Fourthly, we heard that ***an inclusive approach makes a difference***. Inclusive communities are those in which people support one another and help each other out when resources are scarce or difficult to obtain; this can make a very real difference in people's lives. People told us about how an inclusive approach to service delivery can make a real difference, as it ensures that people get the services they need, as well as the assistance they may need in order to obtain those services, without a cost to their dignity.

In conclusion, the information presented in this report has provided us with a unique qualitative glimpse into the lived experiences of some of society's most vulnerable members, as well as the professional observations of a wide range of service providers. The themes identified in this report will help us identify key areas for improvement.

1. Introduction

This is one of a set of reports on the topic of social exclusion and poverty in the Yukon.

To provide the evidence base needed for the development of a Yukon-wide Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Strategy, population-based statistics were gathered and compiled in the report *Dimensions of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in the Yukon, 2010.*

While population-based statistics form a valuable baseline that can be used to identify priority areas, they lack the stories which give context to — and at times an explanation for — experiences of social exclusion. Such stories were gathered at a series of workshops, and the main findings of those workshops are presented here.

Together, the stories and the statistics will give those responsible for developing the Strategy a broader and richer understanding of the challenges faced by Yukon residents who are experiencing social exclusion or poverty.

2. Methodology

Facilitated workshops on the subject of social exclusion and poverty were held in Yukon communities between April and June, 2010.[1] While registration was limited due to room capacity, the workshop organizers worked to accommodate all interested individuals, including:

- ⇨ Government employees who provide services to the public;
- ⇨ Representatives from service-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and
- ⇨ Members of the public.

In some cases, NGOs actively recruited members of the public in an effort to ensure that the voices of those who were most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion would be heard. In other cases, participants learned about the workshops from posters, newspaper ads or by word-of-mouth.

The purpose of these workshops was to gather and share qualitative information on people's experiences with poverty and social exclusion. We asked participants to share their stories, highlighting what helped (bridges) and what didn't (barriers). Members of the public shared their personal stories, while most service providers talked about the observations they had made over the years they had worked with vulnerable members of the public.

The stories gathered at the workshops are not intended to represent the experiences of Yukon residents as a whole. The workshop participants were recruited based on their particular interest in the topic, and their stories and observations are theirs alone. This type of research is extremely useful in helping us to understand the experiences of those who have faced poverty and social exclusion, whether in their personal lives or in their work as service providers.

[1] The workshop dates are listed in Appendix 1.

The largest workshop, in Whitehorse, was held at the Gold Rush Inn the day before the 2010 Yukon Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Symposium. The Symposium was open to the public and was well attended.

There were 77 active participants in the Whitehorse workshop. Roughly one third of the participants came from each of the three categories that had been identified in advance for participant recruitment: members of the public, representatives of NGOs, and service providers from various levels of government.[2]

For the Whitehorse workshop, participants arranged themselves around small tables in groups of three to five people. Each group included at least one member of the public, one representative from an NGO and one governmental service provider. A note-taker was assigned to each table.[3]

The workshop facilitator provided direction on the intended group process, both verbally and in the form of an instruction sheet.[4] Each group member was given the opportunity to relay an experience — whether personal or professional — and the role of the other group members was to listen. Each story was to relate in some way to poverty or social exclusion, and speakers were encouraged to include details about what helped or hindered progress in that situation.

The facilitator placed a number of prompts around the room, should anyone have difficulty thinking of a story they wanted to relay. These prompts included:

- ⇨ Good housing
- ⇨ Employment
- ⇨ Schooling
- ⇨ Transportation
- ⇨ The basics (food, clothing and shelter)
- ⇨ Health care
- ⇨ Being healthy
- ⇨ Being safe
- ⇨ Being part of the community
- ⇨ Accessing arts and cultural events

Group members took turns so that everyone would have a chance to tell at least one story by the end of the session.

[2] A full breakout of the participants' affiliations is included in Appendix 2.

[3] The guidelines for recording stories and the story recording sheet can be found in Appendices 3 and 4.

[4] The instructions can be found in Appendix 5.

In order to ensure that rural perspectives were captured as well, a series of workshops were held in these Yukon communities:

- ⇨ Carmacks
- ⇨ Faro
- ⇨ Ross River
- ⇨ Pelly Crossing
- ⇨ Mayo
- ⇨ Beaver Creek
- ⇨ Burwash Landing
- ⇨ Haines Junction
- ⇨ Watson Lake
- ⇨ Teslin
- ⇨ Carcross
- ⇨ Old Crow
- ⇨ Dawson City

There were 66 participants in the community workshops, in total. Breakout groups were formed at the community sessions wherever practical, as determined by the number of participants. The community workshops were held at community health centres, with the exception of Carmacks (where the recreation centre was used) and Watson Lake (where the hospital meeting room was used).

In total, there were 143 workshop participants; the participants shared a total of 240 stories. Following the workshops, the facilitator compiled the handwritten notes taken during the sessions, categorizing them by location, by topic, and by the storytellers' affiliation (member of the public, government representative or NGO).

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics further analyzed the stories by identifying and coding themes that emerged from the data, a process that allowed for consideration of a variety of topics, only some of which were defined by the prompts used at the workshops. The main findings of this thematic analysis are presented in the subsequent parts of this report.

Using thematic analysis, the Bureau of Statistics identified one major theme — ***access to services*** — along with 18 other prevalent, wide-ranging themes. Each story was coded into at least one theme; most stories covered several themes.

3. A picture of social exclusion

The notes taken at each of the workshop sessions painted a rich and varied picture of social exclusion and inclusion in Yukon communities. Members of the public, NGOs and government front-line workers each brought their unique perspectives and priorities to the table.

Themes were not pre-determined; rather, the analyst read through each story and created thematic categories as they became apparent from the data. Themes were intended to broadly categorize the data. The themes summarize the topics that were discussed, but they are not intended to explain the content of the stories in any detail. That deeper level of analysis follows, in the narrative section of this report.

Themes from the stories documented at the Bridges and Barriers workshops.

Domain	Public	NGO	Government[5]	All
Number of stories	106	54	80	240
Theme				
Access to services	56	27	42	125
Housing	24	17	23	64
Disability	25	15	6	46
Transportation	11	8	24	43
Addictions	14	7	17	38
Education	10	7	19	36
Dignity	18	10	7	35
Support networks	17	5	6	28
Employment	15	3	9	27
Threats to safety	14	9	3	26
Recreation	7	5	13	25
Community politics	12	2	11	25
Cycle of poverty	15	7	3	25
Health	17	2	4	23
Isolation	7	0	11	18
Mental health	2	3	12	17
Justice system	3	7	2	12
Racism	2	4	1	7
Child care	1	2	3	6

[5] Government includes representatives from First Nations Governments, Government of Yukon, and Government of Canada.

3.1 Definitions

The coding standard for each theme was defined as follows.

Access to services referred to any mention of something that helped or hindered a person's ability to use services such as health care services, recreation facilities or social assistance.

Stories were coded under the theme **housing** whenever the speaker's story related to homelessness, housing challenges or the necessity of good housing.

The theme **disability** was used whenever a story mentioned barriers that made it difficult for individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities to access services or participate fully in society.

The theme **transportation** was used for stories that referred to transportation difficulties that acted as barriers to social inclusion.

Addictions came up as a theme in stories that described the role of drugs (including tobacco, as well as street drugs) and alcohol in reducing the people's opportunities for self-improvement, as well as the challenges individuals faced in attempting to overcome substance dependency.

Education emerged as a bridge to better income and social inclusion, as well as a barrier wherever education was unavailable or unattained. In addition, some stories talked about education as a service that people had difficulty accessing.

The theme **dignity** was used whenever a story talked about how people should be treated with respect. It was also used whenever a story described how a person was made to feel ashamed or humiliated in a certain situation.

The theme of **support networks** came up in stories where the importance of a helpful community or network of family or friends played an important role in reducing the impact of poverty or social exclusion. It was also used for stories where the lack of support was noted.

Employment was used as a theme whenever a story referred to difficulties gaining or keeping employment, as well as challenges or inequities faced in the workplace.

Threats to safety came up as a theme in stories that talked about violence or unsafe situations that individuals have encountered as a part of their experience of social exclusion or poverty.

Stories that were coded under the theme **recreation** talked about the challenges and barriers faced by individuals who had difficulties accessing recreation centres or participating in recreational activities in their communities.

Community politics emerged as a theme in stories that talked about preferential treatment of some community members over others, as well as exclusion or ostracism of certain people by the community.

The theme **cycle of poverty** was used whenever a story talked about the challenges of breaking out of poverty, as well as inter-generational or community-wide patterns that made it hard for people to improve their lot in life.

Health was used as a theme whenever a story referred to an illness or injury that resulted in impoverishment or social exclusion. It was also used for stories that talked about challenges in accessing necessary health services.

Isolation came up in stories that described a lack of communication technology such as phone and internet. It also came up in stories about communication challenges such as language barriers that resulted in social isolation, and stories in which remote living resulted in physical isolation.

Mental health was mentioned in stories that talked about difficulties in accessing mental health services, as well as stories that described a relationship between poor mental health, social exclusion and poverty.

The theme **justice system** came up in stories which referred to challenges or difficulties in people's interactions with the police, the courts or the jails.

Racism was used as a theme in stories where systematic racial prejudice was mentioned as a barrier to social inclusion or poverty reduction.

The theme of **child care** came up in stories where individuals had difficulty accessing child care services, including child care subsidies, and in stories where the lack of child care served as a barrier to social inclusion.

3.2 Coinciding themes

Most of the stories touched upon several themes, and some themes appeared together with great frequency. While it is beyond the scope of this report to analyze the relationships between the themes in any detail, some substantial patterns are worth noting.

Access to services was a part of a great many stories. Of the other themes, 17 out of 18 shared at least 30% of their stories with access to services. Of the stories coded under child care, for example, 67% were also coded under access to services. For recreation, it was 64%; for health, it was 61%; for transportation, 60% of the stories were also coded under access to services.

There were also a good many stories coded under housing in addition to other themes. Fifty-eight percent of the stories about the justice system were also coded under housing; 52% of the stories coded under threats to safety were also coded under housing.

More details are included in Appendix 6.

3.3 Different voices

Given the different perspectives of members of the public, NGOs and government front-line workers, the stories of each of these groups have been analyzed separately in the following sections of this report.

Members of the public were encouraged to share personal stories. They were asked not to share stories that belonged to other people, even close friends or family members, as those individuals wouldn't have the opportunity to consent to having their stories shared. Also, for consistency, we asked for stories which were told in the first person. For instance, if a story was about a family's difficulty accessing services for a child with a disability, the story was told from the perspective of the parent (the speaker), rather than the perspective of the child. In this way, we were able to hear what it was like for a parent who faces challenges accessing the supports and services their family needs.

Representatives of NGOs and government front-line workers were encouraged to share general observations that they had made in their line of work. While issues of confidentiality prevented them from sharing specific client's stories, they were asked to speak in broad terms about barriers and bridges they had become aware of over their years of work. For example, front-line workers were well positioned to speak about the cycle of poverty and how it affects individuals, families and communities.

In addition, some NGO and government front-line workers chose to share their own personal stories of exclusion or poverty. Though these stories were personal, they were interpreted through the lens of the front-line worker and contained a level of analysis that was informed by the speakers' work. As such, we chose to keep them with the other NGO and government stories for the purpose of analysis.

Most of the stories we collected at the workshops were fairly recent, or they described ongoing concerns and challenges. However, a few people talked about events that had taken place ten or more years ago. With very few exceptions, the stories described events and situations that took place in Yukon.

4. What we heard from the public

This section summarizes all the stories shared by 44 members of the public, by theme. The goal of this part of the report is to relay what was heard as clearly and thoroughly as possible, using thematic categories to help organize the vast quantity of information that was contained in the stories.

To reiterate, the stories gathered at the workshops are not intended to represent the experiences of Yukon residents as a whole. The workshop participants were recruited based on their particular interest in the topic, and their stories and observations are theirs alone. The members of the public who attended the workshops were there to share their own experiences with poverty and social exclusion, in hopes that their stories would be heard, and as a result, things would change for the better.

Themes from the stories shared by members of the public at the Bridges and Barriers workshops.

Region	Community	Whitehorse	Total
Number of stories	22	84	**106**
Theme			
Access to services	9	47	**56**
Disability	1	24	**25**
Housing	6	18	**24**
Dignity	2	16	**18**
Support networks	8	9	**17**
Health	8	9	**17**
Employment	2	13	**15**
Cycle of poverty	6	9	**15**
Addictions	5	9	**14**
Threats to safety	5	9	**14**
Community politics	8	4	**12**
Transportation	2	9	**11**
Education	5	5	**10**
Recreation	3	4	**7**
Isolation	2	5	**7**
Justice system	2	1	**3**
Mental health	0	2	**2**
Racism	1	1	**2**
Child care	0	1	**1**

4.1 Access to services

Many of the personal stories shared by members of the public shared a common thread: ***access to services***. A number of people talked about difficulties accessing a variety of services, such as those relating to income support, transportation, housing, disability support, health care, addiction care, counselling, victim support, training and child care.

In 24 of the stories, access to services related in some way to ***income support***. A few people talked about having to fight for social assistance, or not knowing where to go for financial help. More often, though, people talked about how social assistance did not help them with extraneous expenses, such as special clothing required for an employment opportunity, retrofits to a dwelling to accommodate a disability, unexpected costs due to medical travel and communication devices such as phone and internet.

Some people noted that furniture and clothing allowances were not flexible enough to allow them to make purchases when needed. The furniture allowance could not be used at garage sales, which made it difficult for a person to use it frugally. Some people said they didn't know about the special allowances and they felt they had to secretly ask family members for help when they needed household things.

People also faced challenges in trying to access services besides those offered by social assistance, such as transportation, recreation and supports for developing a healthy lifestyle. A few people suggested that it would be helpful to have an information booklet, advocate or guide to help them navigate the system.

Some people had challenges that were specific to the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) social assistance program. In particular, people reported a problem with a time lag between the completion of paperwork and the receipt of the social assistance cheque. There were stories of people being evicted or having their electricity cut off while they waited for the cheque to arrive. In addition, some said that landlords were leery of accepting tenants who were on INAC social assistance, as they knew the rent might not always be paid on time.

Some individuals who received disability benefits in addition to social assistance felt burdened by the paperwork required to continue receiving their benefits. They said that an annual doctor's report was required, and they had to pay a fee to receive the report. They would like the system to be simplified for people with life-long disabilities.

Eleven stories talked about problems ***accessing health care, addiction services, counselling or dental care***. A few of these stories came from communities outside Whitehorse, where the remote location of the community and absence of local services were at the root of the problem. One speaker reported that dental care is not part of the bundle of services covered by Insured Health Services, and the travel costs for residents of small communities who must go to Whitehorse to see a dentist can make the cost of dental care prohibitive.

In Whitehorse, people talked about difficulties in finding a good counsellor or accessing specialized services such as home care. Others said they encountered barriers when they needed help obtaining smoking cessation aids, contraceptives, elective surgery or alternative medicines.

Eight stories talked about accessing ***housing*** services. One speaker in Old Crow said the Yukon Housing programs were inaccessible for that community. In Whitehorse, challenges in accessing housing services ranged as follows:

- A woman's inability to access Kaushee's as her children can't join her there, as they are adults now;
- Difficulty finding affordable, adequate, quality housing when on social assistance;
- Safe housing for women who may not qualify to stay at Kaushee's;
- Housing for women when they get out of jail;
- Shelter for male single parents;
- Funding for renovations, to bring housing up to a basic standard; and
- A safe daytime drop-in centre so people could get off the street and socialize.

Eight stories referred to difficulties accessing ***disability supports***. The speakers said they lacked supports such as help with paperwork, disability accommodation at Yukon College, and support for parents raising disabled children in their homes. Also, one speaker had difficulties navigating the system for a child with a disability; services were client-directed, and this parent did not know what services to ask for. Another parent of a disabled child talked about a lack of continuity between services provided to children and those available to disabled adults after they have aged out of the children's services.

Five stories talked about difficulties accessing ***transportation services***. To summarize, people said that the public transit system is limited in Whitehorse, with a lack of evening and Sunday service. Reportedly, Handibus service is even more limited. People pointed out that taxis are costly and social assistance will not cover the cost of a taxi ride. For those with disabilities, cashing a social assistance cheque and obtaining a bus pass can be challenging, as they said cheques are not direct deposited and bus passes have to be picked up in person at City Hall. Increased transit services and improved access for those with disabilities would help.

4.2 Disability

Disabilities came up in a number of stories; those related to ***access to services*** are discussed above. Additional themes involving disability were:

- Difficulty finding or keeping employment. People talked about barriers such as physical or cognitive limitations, lack of support for disabilities in the workplace, and a perception that people are stereotyped or judged on the basis of their disability;
- Difficulty finding suitable housing and communicating with landlords;
- Difficulty completing legal paperwork;
- Difficulty participating in public events; and
- Difficulty overcoming communication barriers.

The kinds of things that people said had helped or would help included secure employment, housing, social support, medical care, education or training, participatory arts and culture opportunities, removal of mobility or access barriers, and the elimination of discrimination.

4.3 Housing

The issue of housing is discussed briefly above, in relation to ***access to services***. In addition, there were a number of other stories about housing. These touched upon issues such as:

- ⇨ Maintenance problems with private-sector rental properties, as well as band housing;
- ⇨ Safety concerns around low-cost housing, due to maintenance concerns as well as drug and alcohol use in the buildings;
- ⇨ Lack of availability of rental units;
- ⇨ Wait lists for social housing;
- ⇨ The high cost of housing in Yukon communities;
- ⇨ Difficulty getting housing when released from jail or when moving to Whitehorse from another Yukon community;
- ⇨ Difficulty finding a landlord who will accept a tenant on social assistance;
- ⇨ Difficulty getting a reference;
- ⇨ Vulnerability of homeless women who become targets for abuse;
- ⇨ The need for a lump sum of money to purchase a home; and
- ⇨ Lack of legislation to protect tenants who complain about maintenance problems.

The speakers said some things had helped, or would have helped, such as being able to rent to family members,[6] getting into social housing, having quality standards for hotels and apartments, and implementing some form of rent control.

For those who just got out of jail, it would be helpful to be given an address or phone number to help them find a place to stay. People also suggested that it would be more efficient for the Yukon Government to invest in social housing and safe housing instead of renting hotel rooms for social assistance recipients. Also, some said First Nation governments should invest in support systems to help people, rather than focusing on restrictive rules and regulations.

One person received a windfall of money which was used to buy a mobile home, thereby breaking a long cycle of housing instability.

[6] Some speakers said that social assistance will not pay a rent subsidy in cases where an SA recipient rents a room or suite in a home belonging to a family member.

4.4 Dignity

The issue of dignity came up in a number of stories. When accessing services such as social assistance, public transportation or services for children with disabilities, some people said they felt humiliated, embarrassed, judged, inferior or powerless.

The speakers said it would help if service providers, employers and landlords treated everyone with respect. Specifically, people said the following things had helped, or would help:

- Consistent provision of social assistance cheques from INAC;
- Accessible office spaces (such as low counters) and removal of physical barriers which divide service people from their clients;
- Clear communication with people on what services are available to them;
- More flexibility in how household goods can be purchased by social assistance recipients, including the elimination of the requirement for an acquisition order, which can be embarrassing to use;
- Personalized care and services for individuals with unique needs;
- Avoidance of assumptions about people based on stereotyping or labelling; and
- Being met with compassion and understanding by service agencies.

4.5 Support networks

Many stories emphasized the importance of support networks, as well as the consequences of inadequate supports.

These stories pointed to a number of helpful supports or suggestions for what might help, including these community-level supports:

- Support groups and support services for single fathers, First Nation women, individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities, parents raising children with disabilities and other unique groups;
- Community support for local people who need help — the kindness of strangers;
- An inclusive, accepting, non-judgmental community;
- Support networks among street-involved people — helping each other out;
- Supports and connections for individuals leaving jail;
- Drop-in centres that offer free lunches;
- A safe and friendly place where a person can go and talk; and
- A liaison person in Whitehorse for people from small Yukon communities.

Some valuable personal supports were mentioned as well:

- Having people do community service hours by helping handicapped, elderly or underserved people;
- Social events that don't involve alcohol;
- Support from family members in obtaining necessary paperwork and historical documents such as birth certificates; and
- Having a significant other.

4.6 Health, mental health and addictions

As the stories often touched upon a combination of health, mental health and addictions issues, these themes are addressed together here.

Many of the stories illustrated how chronic or severe health problems can impact a person's life in many ways. The cost of living rises when one is ill; special foods, medications, special equipment or extra travel may be necessary. The travel requirement is particularly challenging for residents of smaller Yukon communities.

Meanwhile, employment opportunities may be reduced and a person's mobility might be restricted due to an injury or chronic pain. Poor health increases the likelihood that a person will fall into poverty, while poverty makes it difficult to improve one's health.

Addictions were mentioned by those who had difficulty getting help for drug or alcohol dependency, as well as others who felt socially isolated because they wished to avoid drugs and alcohol and there are few non-drinking social events.

Those with drug or alcohol dependency problems said they had difficulty participating fully in society; they may have had their children taken away by social services, or they said their relationships have fallen apart. Besides drugs and alcohol, some stories mentioned tobacco and gambling addictions.

Some spoke of community-wide problems with drugs and alcohol, with young people being pressured to drink or use drugs, and a lack of support for those who want to quit. For some speakers, drug and alcohol use was widespread and unchallenged in the home environment, among youth peer groups and among those using shelters available to impoverished people. This steady exposure to an unhealthy lifestyle left the individuals fighting an uphill battle to try and overcome substance use dependency, and some speakers weren't sure how to get help.

In the two stories that mentioned mental health, both speakers said it was hard to get counselling. They mentioned a lengthy wait list, prohibitive costs for private counselling, and concerns about confidentiality in group therapy.

4.7 Employment

A handful of stories touched upon employment issues. Most of these stories mentioned how a disability or serious health problem made it difficult or impossible for the speaker to work. Others mentioned how they found it hard to find an employer who would hire them because of a disability, chronic health problem, or because they are on social assistance. A speaker had turned down a job offer while on social assistance because he was unable to purchase the clothing required for the job.

One speaker said it was hard to advance at work due to perceived gender discrimination. Meanwhile, three speakers from small communities said it is difficult to find employment in their communities because of community politics and preferential hiring practices.

4.8 Cycle of poverty

While some stories talked about specific incidents where the speaker had experienced social exclusion, others talked more broadly about the cycle of poverty. These stories highlighted the intersecting factors that made it hard for a person to move out of poverty. The factors people mentioned were:

- Low education;
- Lack of life skills;
- Growing up poor;
- Disability;
- The high cost of living;
- A pattern of dependency;
- Social acceptability of one's failure to succeed;
- Lack of consistent support, such as regularly-issued INAC social assistance cheques;
- Lack of options for people seeking a healthy lifestyle or safe places to go;
- Lack of affordable, safe housing;
- Challenges navigating the system of social services;
- Difficulty finding work in small communities, or obtaining work when one doesn't have enough money for appropriate clothing or equipment; and
- Difficulty accessing support networks.

Those who had successfully moved out of poverty were able to identify a turning point, such as the windfall of money that enabled one person to purchase a mobile home.

4.9 Threats to safety

Safety came up in stories where the speakers mentioned they had been the victims of violence, sexual abuse or harassment. These incidents had taken place as a part of street life, home life, schooling or employment. In some cases, the speakers said they had trouble accessing support or help from the police, victim services or their employer.

Safety also came up in more general terms. Several speakers talked about how unsafe it is for a woman to couch surf or live on the street. Others mentioned the need for a safe drop-in centre where people are not using drugs or alcohol. Additionally, some speakers identified a need for safe housing for women.

4.10 Community politics and racism

Community politics and racism came out in a handful of stories. They are discussed together here, because they appeared to create similar barriers in many situations; they both created a sense of injustice and unequal treatment.

Three speakers talked about how community politics made it hard for individuals to express their concerns. Those who spoke up were penalized, in that they suddenly found themselves unable to access services.

Four speakers mentioned how community politics created an unfair system in their small communities, in which some families were given preference over others when it came to employment, housing and access to other resources. They also said that those who complained were penalized for speaking up.

Two speakers mentioned how difficult it can be to break into social networks when one does not quite fit the mould. For instance, a Métis woman from another province said it was hard for her to become involved with the local Francophone association because her heritage was different from that of other members. Another person said she felt intimidated as a First Nation woman when trying to participate in organized public events.

Racism emerged as a theme in two of these stories. One speaker referred to aboriginal people as 'invisible' or unacknowledged in their community; the other talked about the lack of credibility afforded to First Nation people when speaking with police.

4.11 Transportation and isolation

A number of stories touched upon transportation issues. Meanwhile, a handful of stories addressed the problem of social isolation.

Social isolation took several forms:

- ⇨ A lack of social support networks that would meet an individual's unique needs;
- ⇨ The isolation associated with living in a small community (distance to shops and services, the need for transportation, and so forth);
- ⇨ Isolation due to being home-bound in winter; and
- ⇨ Inability to afford communication services such as phone and internet.

In most cases, there was a simple solution, such as provision of appropriate footwear to allow an individual to leave the home safely during icy conditions. However, the isolation associated with living in a small community is more difficult and costly to overcome.

Affordable, reliable transportation would help those in remote communities to overcome some of the challenges of small-town living. In addition, transportation would give people more housing options, as it is difficult for a person without a private vehicle to live outside of the Whitehorse city centre.

The shortcomings of Whitehorse public transit were mentioned by a number of speakers, in terms of the area serviced, the hours of service and the availability of the Handibus. Several speakers said they relied on hitchhiking to get around.

4.12 Education

For the most part, education came up in stories in one of two ways: lack of education as a barrier to personal advancement, and education or training as a breakthrough that allows a person to get ahead. A few speakers talked about how difficult it is to get an education when one has low literacy or one needs disability supports.

4.13 Recreation

Recreation came up in a handful of stories, most often with respect to access to recreation facilities. Three speakers said they felt there were limited healthy recreation activities available in their communities. One person said the local recreation centre was filthy and sub-standard. Another speaker said his health problems made participation in recreation programs impossible. Meanwhile, two speakers said they could not physically access some facilities, such as the Canada Games Centre, due to transportation and mobility challenges.

4.14 Justice system

A few stories touched upon people's encounters with the justice system. Two people talked about a lack of support for people when they get out of jail. They found there was no place for them to stay. A third person described the lack of support from their own community when they were incarcerated; their band housing was jeopardized, as they were unable to occupy the residence while in prison and it was given to someone else.

4.15 Child care

One speaker mentioned a lack of child care as a barrier to her obtaining medical treatment.

5. What we heard from the NGO community

In total, 30 representatives from non-governmental organizations participated in the workshops. The representatives were front-line workers who had direct interactions with their client groups. A few shared personal stories, while most shared general observations about the challenges their clients faced.

Themes from the stories shared by members of the NGO community at the Bridges and Barriers workshops.

Region	Community	Whitehorse	Total
Number of stories	1	53	54
Theme			
Access to services	1	26	27
Housing	1	16	17
Disability	0	15	15
Transportation	0	8	8
Addictions	1	6	7
Education	0	7	7
Dignity	0	10	10
Support networks	0	5	5
Employment	0	3	3
Threats to safety	1	8	9
Recreation	0	5	5
Community politics	1	1	2
Cycle of poverty	1	6	7
Health	0	2	2
Isolation	0	0	0
Mental health	0	3	3
Justice system	0	7	7
Racism	0	4	4
Child care	0	2	2

5.1 Access to services

As with the members of the public, the NGO representatives often talked about the challenges people faced when trying to access services. Their professional perspectives enabled them to comment more broadly about complex, systemic challenges, such as the lack of a smooth interface between various service agencies.

One speaker noted that ***programs and services*** are extremely limited in communities outside Whitehorse and transportation is a problem for youth who are unable to access services. Another speaker mentioned that it is difficult to provide adequate services to individuals with no fixed address, as there is no way to contact them. One said that agencies should be linked better, as there are bureaucratic barriers between Yukon government and non-governmental organizations which make service delivery difficult. Meanwhile, another speaker said that social workers need to work on empathizing with their clients, to better understand the impact of racism and prejudice.

The need for better access to ***housing supports*** came up frequently. Several speakers mentioned that their clients need supported housing; in one case, the speaker was talking about home living supports for aging or infirm clients, as well as those who are hard to house, while two other speakers talked about the need for supported housing for clients with disabilities, addictions and mental health challenges. Where those supports existed, they were identified as bridges enabling the successful housing of difficult to house clients. One speaker mentioned the paperwork required by Yukon Housing and the challenge this posed for some clients. This speaker also pointed to supported living as a bridge; their clients needed help with things such as filing taxes, budgeting and cooking. Meanwhile, a speaker from a community outside Whitehorse mentioned that a shortage of housing in that community prevented service providers from settling in; there were reportedly service providers who left the community because they couldn't find anywhere to live.

Four stories talked about challenges with ***social assistance*** and related aspects of living in poverty. Late social assistance cheques from INAC had reportedly caused some clients to lose their housing. Two stories talked about the push-pull of being on social assistance and how claw-backs made it difficult for people to break out of poverty. Meanwhile, one speaker talked about how the cost of laundry and new clothing made it difficult for people to fit in. Two of these speakers particularly mentioned the impact on children, who are socially excluded as a result of poverty. They felt there should be better community and program-level support for impoverished families.

Similarly, three speakers talked about barriers to accessing ***recreation*** programs and facilities. They talked about how the working poor may have transportation challenges, financial challenges and time constraints that make it difficult for their children to participate in sports. In addition, one speaker noted how the Canada Games Centre is in an inaccessible location for those with transportation challenges or physical disabilities, while many people would benefit from more substance-free leisure activities.

Disability supports came up in four of the stories in relation to access to services. One speaker mentioned that physical mobility barriers prevent some individuals with disabilities from accessing many programs and services. The other three speakers talked about the inadequacy of supports for children with disabilities. Programs are not easily accessible or are inadequate, while support for parents (such as child care) is extremely limited. One speaker noted that parents need non-threatening support for raising disabled children in their homes, without fear of being judged or losing their children. One speaker talked about the challenge of transitioning between child and adult services when disabled children come of age. She noted that there seemed to be an expectation that the disabled young adult would collect social assistance, and it is extremely difficult to obtain the necessary supports to enable a disabled person to obtain a higher education or have a job.

The remaining stories talked about specific supports that would help people access services, including:

- Help producing and distributing resumes;
- Financial support for privately-obtained mental health assessments;
- An affordable, heavily-subsidized territorial child care system;
- Advocacy for women fleeing abusive relationships, as well as better access to counselling and temporary housing;
- Better access to police services for aboriginal people, by way of cultural sensitivity and more aboriginal police officers;
- Help overcoming language barriers; and
- Greater availability of physician services in French.

5.2 Disability

Fifteen of the stories related to physical or cognitive disabilities. Of these, five speakers talked about how their clients with cognitive disabilities face multiple challenges. They may have safety concerns, poor support networks, inadequate housing or transportation challenges. They may also have difficulties accessing services such as counselling, as noted above. Similarly, two stories addressed the challenges faced by people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, in that it is not treated effectively and they are penalized by the justice system rather than receiving the help and support their condition warrants.

Three stories addressed the need for better disability supports within the education system and in extra-curricular programs. Also, as mentioned above, two stories talked about the need for improved access to parental supports as well as social services for children with disabilities.

Finally, one story talked about the challenge of re-entering the workforce with a physical disability and the loss of social assistance as one begins to work more hours.

5.3 Housing

Seventeen of the stories from non-governmental organizations related to housing. These stories described the following problems:

- The short supply of rental housing;
- A shortage of affordable housing;
- A need for more social housing;
- A need for supported housing;
- The need for improved housing quality and tenant protection;
- A need for clients to be housed in order to provide them with services effectively; and
- A need for more housing in communities outside Whitehorse for both clients and service providers.

5.4 Dignity

Dignity came up as a theme in ten stories from the non-governmental organization representatives. In each of these stories, someone felt degraded, hopeless, powerless or ashamed because of prejudice or stigma associated with poverty, reliance on the soup kitchen or social assistance, cognitive disability, or race.

The speakers emphasized that for the sake of dignity, each person needs a space to call their own and to have their basic needs met without shame.

5.5 Support networks

Five of the stories shared by representatives of non-governmental organizations covered the theme of support networks. They addressed a range of issues, including:

- The need for a support network to help young people maintain employment and manage their schedules (i.e., getting to work on time);
- The role of support networks in helping low-income families feel included;
- The necessity of support networks in keeping a person out of poverty following a debilitating accident; and
- The role of support networks in helping people end the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

5.6 Health, mental health and addictions

Health, mental health and addictions appeared as themes in a handful of stories. The two stories that touched upon health issues talked about the inadequacy of existing supports for people with serious health challenges. Three stories addressed the theme of mental health; similarly, these stories identified a lack of sufficient supports for people with serious mental health challenges, including inadequate funding for assessments, a lack of extensive supports such as supported living, and the difficulty individuals may face when trying to seek employment with a history of mental illness.

Meanwhile, seven stories addressed the theme of addictions. These stories identified the following challenges:

- Community-wide substance abuse problems;
- The role of drugs and alcohol in an individual's efforts to fit in with a peer group;
- The need for supported housing and healthy living environments where substance abuse is not encouraged; and
- The particular challenges faced by individuals with FASD who may be particularly susceptible to substance use problems.

5.7 Employment

Employment was a theme in three of the stories from the NGO representatives. One story mentioned how individuals who work beyond a certain amount can lose their social assistance benefits. A second speaker talked about the need for social support in helping young workers maintain employment. The third speaker mentioned how living in a late-night partying atmosphere makes it hard for individuals to hold a job; this speaker discussed the relationship between lack of housing, unemployment and substance use.

5.8 Cycle of poverty

Seven stories from the NGO representatives featured the cycle of poverty. These stories mentioned a variety of complex challenges including:

- Intergenerational poverty, with the majority of impoverished children growing up to be impoverished adults;
- A community-wide sense of hopelessness and apathy in a small community;
- Claw-backs that impact income support and make it hard for families to get ahead;
- The relationship between homelessness, substance use issues, and mental health issues; and
- The value of programs that help break the cycle of poverty, such as the food for learning program in the schools.

5.9 Threats to safety

Safety issues were mentioned in nine stories. Eight of the nine stories talked about abusive relationships and violence in the home. In many cases, the speakers talked about inadequate supports to help people, as well as the high prevalence of abuse and victimization in the territory. The ninth story mentioned that people need safe housing, and support workers often see that it is lacking.

5.10 Community politics and racism

Community politics were mentioned in two stories, while racism was featured in four of the stories from NGO representatives.

Community politics were mentioned in small communities where there is a huge socio-economic divide, with impoverished people being marginalized and the community at large being in denial about its substantial social problems.

Three speakers talked about racism in terms of a perception that the RCMP is biased against First Nations people. Two speakers talked about learned racism and the subsequent undervaluing of aboriginal people, which serves as a barrier to full participation in society.

5.11 Transportation and isolation

While eight of the stories from NGO representatives talked about transportation challenges, none of the speakers addressed the theme of isolation. In every case, transportation was discussed in terms of access to services, recreation or employment. People mentioned shortcomings with bus service in Whitehorse, as well as the cost of taxis.

5.12 Education

Seven stories from NGO representatives talked about education. Four of these stories mentioned difficulties in getting educated when one has a disability, due to segregation of students with cognitive disabilities, use of a special graduation certificate that is not valid for entering a post-secondary institution, and lack of supports for individuals with learning disabilities when they want to pursue higher education.

Two of the remaining stories talked about the need for home support as well as in-school support for children who live in poverty. For instance, special programs such as music and drama programs are less accessible for students who don't have a strong family support network. The final story addressed the negative impact of residential school on an individual's life course, due to the abuse and victimization that took place there.

5.13 Recreation

Recreation was a theme in five stories. All the stories mentioned barriers to participating in recreation programs on account of financial difficulties, inadequacy of the Kids Recreation Fund, and transportation difficulties coupled with the poor location of recreation facilities.

5.14 Justice system

The justice system emerged as a theme in seven of the stories from NGO representatives. These stories talked about the following issues:

- A perception of racial profiling of First Nations people, particularly by the police;
- A desire to have more First Nations police officers as well as greater cultural sensitivity on the part of the police;
- A desire to see more use of alternatives to incarceration, particularly for small offences;
- A desire to see more use of restorative justice and to help people attend court-mandated counselling sessions, which they may miss due to social or transportation issues;
- A desire for justice system reforms to better serve individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder;
- Inability for individuals in jail to make arrangements for social assistance when they are released; and
- Homeless people committing crimes so they will be incarcerated during the winter months, or being in and out of jail for other reasons related to homelessness.

5.15 Child care

Child care came up in two stories. Both stories mentioned the high cost of child care, as well as the need for a well-subsidized universal child care system for the territory. One story also mentioned that one's work hours are limited by the hours that daycare is available.

6. What we heard from government front-line workers

The workshops were well-attended by government front-line workers, including 52 Yukon Government employees, 14 Yukon First Nation employees, and three Government of Canada employees. As with the NGO representatives, most of the government employees shared their general observations about the challenges their clients faced, while some shared personal stories about social exclusion or poverty.

Themes from the stories shared by government front-line workers at the Bridges and Barriers workshops.

Region	Community	Whitehorse	Total
Number of stories	49	31	80
Theme			
Access to services	30	12	42
Housing	14	9	23
Disability	2	4	6
Transportation	21	3	24
Addictions	12	5	17
Education	18	1	19
Dignity	2	5	7
Support networks	2	4	6
Employment	7	2	9
Threats to safety	2	1	3
Recreation	8	5	13
Community politics	7	4	11
Cycle of poverty	2	1	3
Health	4	0	4
Isolation	10	1	11
Mental health	5	7	12
Justice system	1	1	2
Racism	0	1	1
Child care	3	0	3

6.1 Access to services

As with the other groups of participants, the government front-line workers shared a large number of stories that addressed the theme ***access to services***.

Speakers from communities outside Whitehorse spoke universally about the inadequacy of services in rural communities. These stories came from many communities — Watson Lake, Haines Junction, Teslin, Faro, Carmacks, Carcross, Old Crow, Pelly Crossing, Mayo, Burwash Landing and Ross River.

The speakers told us that ***health services*** in small communities are limited and people must travel to Whitehorse or outside the territory for the bulk of their health, mental health and dental appointments and treatments. While some services are provided in the smaller communities, people reported that positions are sometimes difficult to staff and small communities rely heavily on workers who travel in periodically from Whitehorse.

Transportation is a problem, particularly for low-income people. Some speakers talked about the lack of bus or plane service in their communities. Rural residents who can't afford to have a vehicle of their own may rely on hitchhiking to access services in Whitehorse. Some speakers mentioned the high cost of food and the scarcity of fresh, healthy foods in their communities; those with transportation challenges or weak social networks suffered the most.

As some speakers pointed out, ***education*** opportunities are very limited in communities that lack high schools, and Yukon College doesn't offer a lot of programming in the communities. ***Recreation*** opportunities are also reportedly limited to hockey in some communities, leaving few options for adults and children who don't play hockey.

In addition to the dearth of services in small communities, one speaker mentioned the challenges people with low literacy skills face in filling out forms and jumping through bureaucratic hoops to access services. Another speaker talked about the confidentiality concerns people have when accessing services in a small community.

While one speaker in Whitehorse also highlighted the challenges rural residents face when trying to access services, the remaining speakers emphasized other challenges. Four speakers talked about how some people don't qualify for assistance such as child care subsidy, legal aid or the Kids Recreation Fund, though they would benefit from that assistance. Meanwhile, four speakers talked about challenges people have in initiating their access to services; they mentioned barriers such as confidentiality concerns, difficulty connecting with the right service provider and discomfort approaching services such as the Outreach Van.

The other challenges mentioned by Whitehorse speakers included the inadequacy of existing financial supports such as the Kids Recreation Fund, physical barriers that prevent clients in wheelchairs from accessing their services and difficulty providing services to clients who have no home phone.

6.2 Disability

Disability emerged as a theme in six of the stories from government front-line workers. Three speakers talked about the debilitating effects of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and a fourth speaker mentioned how physical disabilities and long-term health problems make it impossible for some people to get off social assistance. In one story, as mentioned above, a service provider mentioned that their building is not wheelchair accessible. A second speaker mentioned the distance from the parking lot to the pool at the Canada Games Centre and the challenge this poses for people with physical disabilities.

6.3 Housing

A number of speakers from communities outside Whitehorse mentioned the shortage of housing in their communities, while some also raised concerns about the quality of existing housing. Some people reportedly live in over-crowded conditions, while others couch surf. Any available housing may be unaffordable. Social housing is reportedly unavailable in some communities, while others have a lengthy wait list. Home repairs may not be done in a timely fashion due to the lack of people with the necessary skills to do the work in the community.

Some speakers in Whitehorse also talked about housing challenges. Several spoke of the relationship between mental health problems, addictions, poverty and homelessness. They pointed out that nobody will rent to their difficult-to-house clients. A couple of speakers also mentioned that there are few places available to rent and rental accommodations may not be well maintained or up to code. Meanwhile, one speaker noted that there is demand for supported seniors' housing in a downtown location.

6.4 Dignity

Dignity came up as a theme in seven stories from government front-line workers. These stories covered a diverse range of concerns, including:

- People are ashamed to ask for financial help or free passes to recreation centres or events, yet the cost of activities can be prohibitive;
- Services should be user-friendly, not intimidating or confusing; potential clients need to be treated respectfully. A central agency and simplified directions would help with this;
- People with mental health challenges may feel judged or embarrassed, which makes it hard for them to become involved in boards, committees, or school activities with their children;
- People with substance use problems are treated by some members of the public like they aren't human; they get honked at and sworn at or are treated as if they are invisible;
- People report feeling uncomfortable with how the Outreach Van advertises its presence by blaring its horn; and
- Victims of abuse should be treated with sympathy by the police, so they aren't re-victimized when trying to get help.

6.5 Support networks

Support networks were mentioned in six stories from government front-line workers. In three cases, the speakers talked about how support networks had worked well. One mentioned that several clients had received help from the Member of Parliament's office when they weren't able to get help anywhere else. A second speaker talked about her own experience as a new immigrant, and how one individual's efforts had enabled her to be included in a group experience. The third speaker mentioned that young people in one small community support one another in obtaining help when they need it.

The remaining three speakers talked about the consequences of inadequate support networks. One mentioned the lack of family support for education in one small community. The remaining two speakers talked about their work and how they try to do the best they can for their clients (social assistance recipients in one case, and children with learning or behavioural challenges in the other case), despite inadequate support from colleagues. The latter two speakers both mentioned that it helps when their co-workers have a good understanding of the challenges their clients face.

6.6 Health, mental health and addictions

A number of stories from government front-line workers covered the themes of health (4), mental health (12), and addictions (17).

Regarding health, two speakers talked about the lack of availability of health services in a small community. Meanwhile, two speakers talked about the health hazards associated with drinking home-brewed alcohol in a 'dry' community.

Mental health came up as a theme in a number of stories that mentioned the inadequacy of mental health services in smaller communities, as well as in Whitehorse. In addition, two speakers talked about the relationship between mental health problems, poverty and homelessness. Two speakers talked about how people with mental health problems are socially excluded, or may have difficulty recognizing that they need help.

The stories that covered the theme of addictions followed one of two storylines: 1) the existence of community-wide drug and alcohol problems and their impact on young people's social development, and 2) the inadequacy of existing services for helping people with substance dependency, particularly in communities outside Whitehorse. Substance use problems were connected with numerous other social challenges, from homelessness to school delinquency.

6.7 Employment

Nine of the stories from government front-line workers covered the theme of employment. Most of these stories mentioned that there are limited work opportunities in rural communities. One speaker said there are lots of jobs, but they mostly pay poorly. Another speaker mentioned that the community hires experts of various types from outside the community, while local residents have a hard time finding work.

Two speakers talked about beneficial programs that help people get into steady employment, including a community project that hired locally and a policy that allows people on social assistance to work a certain amount without losing their benefits. Meanwhile, one speaker talked about a problem with racism undermining an affirmative action program.

6.8 Cycle of poverty

Three people talked about the cycle of poverty and how various factors combine so that people live from pay cheque to pay cheque. Some of the factors mentioned include housing inadequacy, domestic abuse, high cost of living, lack of support, difficulty accessing services and community-wide substance use problems.

6.9 Threats to safety

Threats to safety were mentioned in three stories. All of these stories talked about domestic violence, including violence against women, and elder abuse. One speaker mentioned that homeless women sleep in caves in the clay cliffs around Whitehorse, or they sleep with men in hotels just to have a bed for the night, rather than be forced to return to an abusive home.

6.10 Community politics and racism

Community politics emerged as a theme in 11 stories, while one story also mentioned racism. Five speakers from three small communities talked about political factors and injustices that impact the distribution of resources such as housing and employment in those communities.

Meanwhile, three stories mentioned how those who have problems with drug or alcohol use, mental health challenges, or difficulties when raising their children are judged or excluded by other members of their communities.

Two speakers from small communities talked about how difficult it can be to become part of existing social networks. Finally, as mentioned above (with reference to employment), one speaker talked about the struggle for acceptance and equality among participants of an affirmative action hiring program, due to covert racism.

6.11 Transportation and isolation

Transportation was a very common theme, as it came up in 24 of the stories from front-line government service workers. Isolation came up in 11 stories, often in combination with transportation.

For people living in communities outside Whitehorse, transportation is an essential key to accessing services and activities. Without transportation, services are completely inaccessible, so people miss out.

In some cases, one-way transportation is available (for instance, by way of an emergency ambulance ride), but people are stranded with no way to get home. In other cases, people without a vehicle of their own must rely on government workers for transportation, or they may hitchhike or pay another community member for a ride. Some speakers talked about the absence of bus or plane services in their communities, while others mentioned the high cost of air fare.

Lack of transportation, combined with rural living, was connected with isolation in many stories. In addition, several speakers talked about social isolation and the need for support, particularly for single parents, elders and victims of abuse.

6.12 Education

Education emerged as a theme in 19 of the stories from government front-line workers. The vast majority of these stories came from communities outside Whitehorse, with a universal theme: education opportunities are too limited in those communities. Most communities don't have high schools, so youth must go to Whitehorse to finish school. There, things get out of control, with many students dropping out or using drugs or alcohol. Also, some speakers mentioned that Yukon College offers limited training opportunities in communities outside Whitehorse.

Four stories talked about the particular challenges associated with learning disabilities, low literacy, emotional issues and other factors that influence children's success in school. Meanwhile, three stories mentioned how the lack of home support can result in failure at school. One speaker talked about barriers to getting job qualifications such as a carpenter's ticket or upgraded driver's license. These barriers included things such as the need to stay sober to keep one's license and the lack of training opportunities in small communities.

6.13 Recreation

Thirteen stories featured recreation as a theme. Nine of the stories highlighted barriers to participation, including lack of transportation, feeling unwelcome or a need for better financial support. Four stories talked about limited recreation opportunities in communities outside Whitehorse.

6.14 Justice system

The justice system was mentioned in two stories from front-line workers. One speaker said it is difficult to get help following sexual abuse, due to the perception that police are unsympathetic. The second speaker talked about how difficult it is to access services regarding interpersonal violence (i.e., victim services and emergency housing) in a small community.

6.15 Child care

Three of the stories from government front-line workers talked about child care. Two speakers mentioned that child care services are limited or lacking in their communities. A third speaker from a small community talked about how older teenagers (particularly girls) are expected to look after their younger siblings when they have moved to Whitehorse for high school.

7. Conclusions

The Bridges and Barriers workshops presented a unique opportunity for members of the public, non-governmental organizations, and government front-line service workers to get together and share their experiences in a confidential, non-judgmental setting. For the Office of Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, these workshops were an invaluable learning experience. They provided the Social Inclusion team with a wealth of information on what is working well, and what is not working so well for people experiencing social exclusion or poverty. The key findings are summarized here.

7.1 Access to services can be impeded by systemic barriers

The theme of ***access to services*** permeated many of the stories that were shared at the workshops. We heard about many systemic barriers that impeded people's access to a wide range of services.

Members of the public talked about difficulties they have had when trying to access a variety of services, such as those relating to income support, transportation, housing, disability support, health care, addiction care, counselling, victim support, training and child care.

Some people said they felt they had to fight to access the services they needed. They may have felt judged, prejudiced against, discouraged, overwhelmed or otherwise impeded in their efforts to access services. Other speakers said they didn't know where to go for help or they didn't know if the services they needed were available at all. A few people suggested that it would be helpful to have an information booklet, advocate or guide to help them navigate the system.

NGO representatives and government front-line workers spoke broadly about the scarcity of services available in communities outside Whitehorse. Health, mental health and addiction services, transportation, education and recreation opportunities were identified as key problem areas in many small communities. The centralization of services in Whitehorse, while efficient in many ways, has created a systemic barrier that impacts rural residents more heavily than urban residents.

NGO representatives and government front-line workers talked about other barriers that impede access to services, including the inadequacy of some existing financial supports for low-income households, physical barriers that make it difficult for physically disabled clients to access service agencies and public facilities, and the challenge of providing services to clients with no home phone or no fixed address.

7.2 Housing is an important and complex issue

Housing came up in numerous stories and the speakers identified many diverse housing challenges. Members of the public talked about a number of issues that made it hard for people to be adequately, affordably housed. They pointed to a shortage of affordable, available rental housing and they identified maintenance and safety problems with some of the existing housing. Some said they had a difficult time finding housing because they couldn't get a reference or couldn't find a landlord who would accept a tenant that receives social assistance. The latter dilemma appeared to stem from the inconsistent timing of social assistance cheques from INAC, which makes it difficult for people to pay their bills on time. This concern was echoed by some of the NGO representatives.

Housing was also a problem for people leaving jail, as some said they had no place to go following their release. While there is a halfway house for men, there is no facility for women leaving jail.

NGO representatives and government front-line workers spoke extensively about the need for supported housing for some of their clients, including those who are infirm, as well as those with disabilities, addictions or mental health challenges. Some clients needed help with things such as filing taxes, budgeting and cooking. The completion of paperwork such as filing one's taxes was essential for anyone who wanted to apply for social housing. Some said there isn't enough social housing and the wait lists are long.

While it was clear that housing is an important issue, it was also apparent that there is no simple solution. The speakers called for solutions that ranged between:

- Investment in more social housing;
- Investment in supported housing;
- Legislative reform (*Landlord Tenant Act*); and
- A more user-friendly, consistent and readily accessible network of social services.

7.3 Transportation matters

When it comes to accessing programs and services, the speakers made it very clear that transportation matters. They also made it clear that those who are most easily marginalized — such as people with low incomes, people with disabilities, people living in isolated regions and people with weak social networks — are most heavily impacted by transportation challenges.

Public transit plays an essential role in providing equitable access to goods, services and public facilities for people from all sectors of society. Many of the speakers talked about the limitations of public transit in Whitehorse, as well as its absence in smaller Yukon communities. Further investment in public transit would help to overcome the chronic deprivation, under-service and social isolation suffered by the most easily marginalized members of our population.

7.4 Location matters

While stories of social exclusion and poverty came from all over the territory, those from Whitehorse differed somewhat from those from smaller Yukon communities.

Compared to Whitehorse, the smaller communities are much more heavily impacted by the scarcity of local services and as a result, the smaller communities are affected by the high cost or unavailability of transportation. As well as impeding access to services, the isolation of small communities appeared to negatively impact people's recreation and education opportunities. Many speakers emphasized how strongly the lack of community-based opportunities have affected youth and how youth are negatively impacted by the need to live away from their families in order to complete high school.

7.5 An inclusive approach makes a difference

Many of the stories made it clear that an inclusive approach can make a very real difference to people's lives. Inclusive communities are those in which people support one another and help each other out when resources are scarce or difficult to obtain. Strong social networks enable some residents from small communities to obtain the goods and services they need, while others go without as they don't have friends or family they can share transportation with.

An inclusive approach to service delivery can also make a real difference. This can involve something as simple as giving someone a ride to an appointment. It can be as concrete as setting up an office so that it is wheelchair accessible, with low counters and minimized physical barriers between service providers and their clients. It can also be as abstract as ensuring that service providers act as facilitators rather than gatekeepers; service providers can make a huge difference when they help people navigate the system. In many cases, this means helping clients identify and obtain the services that they would most benefit from. An inclusive approach to service delivery is one in which people get the services they need, as well as the assistance they may need in order to obtain those services, without a cost to their dignity.

7.6 Next steps

As this report is only one of a series of several reports which document social exclusion and poverty in Yukon, it is just one part of the body of information that will be used to inform a social inclusion and poverty reduction strategy for the territory. That said, it is an essential part. It provides us with a unique qualitative glimpse into the lived experiences of some of society's most vulnerable members, as well as the professional observations of a wide range of service providers. The themes identified in this report will help us identify key areas for improvement.

Appendix 1. Schedule of public meetings

Community	Date
Whitehorse	Apr 8, 2010
Carmacks	May 31, 2010
Faro	June 1, 2010
Ross River	June 1, 2010
Pelly Crossing	June 2, 2010
Mayo	June 3, 2010
Beaver Creek	June 7, 2010
Burwash Landing	June 8, 2010
Haines Junction	June 9, 2010
Watson Lake	June 14, 2010
Teslin	June 15, 2010
Carcross	June 16, 2010
Old Crow	June 22, 2010
Dawson City	June 24, 2010

Appendix 2. Workshop participants

Community	Members of the Public	Non-governmental organization Representatives	Government of Canada Representatives	Government of Yukon Representatives	First Nations Government Representatives	Total
Whitehorse	26	28	3	18	2	77
Carmacks	0	0	0	3	0	3
Faro	3	0	0	6	0	9
Ross River	1	0	0	2	2	5
Pelly Crossing	1	0	0	1	0	2
Mayo	0	0	0	3	2	5
Beaver Creek	0	0	0	2	0	2
Burwash Landing	6	0	0	1	2	9
Haines Junction	2	1	0	3	5	11
Watson Lake	1	1	0	3	0	5
Teslin	0	0	0	3	0	3
Carcross	1	0	0	3	0	4
Old Crow	1	0	0	3	1	5
Dawson City	2	0	0	1	0	3
Total	**44**	**30**	**3**	**52**	**14**	**143**

Appendix 3.
Guidelines for recording stories

Recorders must familiarise themselves with the instructions for the workshop. The recorder's role is not to facilitate the group. The role is instead to document the story in a comprehensive and organised fashion and seek whatever clarification may be required to enable that to be done.

The tool to be used for recapturing the stories is the Story Recording Sheet. It is imperative that all sections be completed for every story. If the recorder is not certain what to put in any of the sections, he/she should ask the storyteller for help in that regard. After the story has been told, the scribe may ask the storyteller such questions as:

- "What would you like me to write down about that?"
- "How should I describe that?"
- "What is the key thing I need to record?"

Recorders must make detailed notes on the Story Recording Sheet. It is important that sufficient data be recorded in each of the spaces on the sheet to enable a third party to:

- Know what kind of participant told the story;
- Get the gist of what the story was about;
- See what barriers were in play; and
- Understand what bridges helped, or could have helped the situation.

The recorder must ask sufficient clarifying questions to enable him/her to accomplish the task to the standard described above. It is important that the recorder print his/her name in the space provided to enable follow-up as required. The recorder must also check one of the five boxes to indicate which category of participant told this story.

If the Recorder recognises a situation where a storyteller who is a member of the public may be recounting a story of a situation in which he/she was not directly involved but about which he/she heard from someone else, it may be helpful in this regard to ask the storyteller direct questions such as "To whom did this happen?" "How did you become aware of this story?" In those situations where it is confirmed this is a hearsay story, the recorder must not record the story.

If the Recorder recognises a situation where a storyteller who is a service provider may be recounting a story of a situation relating to a specific client the recorder must not record the story.

If a Recorder observes any failure in the small group to adhere to the ground rules or protocols in the workshop instructions he/she should advise the workshop leader during the next break.

Appendix 4. Story Recording Sheet

This story was told by: (check **one** of the **five** choices)					
A member of the public ☐	**or** a rep of:	YG ☐	FN Govt ☐	INAC ☐	NGO ☐
Recorder's Name: _____					
The story (summary of main facts; write on back or add sheets if required)					
Barriers (those things that prevented the person from being included to the extent desired)					
Bridges (those things that supported the person being included to the extent desired)					

Appendix 5. Steps for small groups

Getting started

1. Group members introduce themselves to one another.
2. Group reviews ground rules and adjusts as necessary to obtain commitment to ground rules from all participants in the group.
3. Groups manage their own timing and breaks to fit their needs.

Telling stories

> **Reminder**
> Stories must be about something you experienced directly, either personally or in your line of work: no second-hand stories

4. One participant tells a story of social inclusion or poverty.

The group follows the following guidelines:

- ⇨ Others in the group listen without speaking. A talking stick in the form of a laminated set of prompts will be used to limit interruptions.
- ⇨ Once the speaker is finished telling his/her story, he/she may pass the talking stick to other participants to enable them to ask clarifying questions.
- ⇨ No one asks why the storyteller did or did not do something.
- ⇨ No one offers advice or suggestions.
- ⇨ Once the other participants are finished asking their questions, the talking stick is passed to the recorder to enable him/her to ask any questions that may be necessary to enable him/her to make a complete and accurate record of the story on the Story Recording Sheet.
- ⇨ If a member of the small group feels he/she has a great suggestion for the storyteller, he/she must keep it to him/herself during the small-group work. Once the group takes a break, the member may ask the storyteller permission to offer the suggestion; if permission is granted, he/she may offer the idea.

5. Once all steps have been completed for a story, another member of the small groups receives the talking stick and tells a story. The group follows the same guidelines for each story.
6. The rotation continues, ensuring each participant has the opportunity to tell as many stories as each other participant. Any participant can pass at anytime if he or she chooses at any point not to tell a story.

Appendix 6. Coinciding themes

Theme	Access to services	Housing	Disability	Transportation	Addictions	Education	Dignity	Support Networks	Employment	Threats to safety	Recreation	Community politics	Cycle of poverty	Health	Isolation	Mental health	Justice system	Racism	Child care
Access to services	100%	43%	50%	60%	35%	56%	54%	43%	30%	48%	64%	42%	38%	61%	50%	47%	17%	43%	67%
Housing	22%	100%	24%	21%	32%	25%	17%	29%	19%	52%	20%	29%	17%	17%	11%	18%	58%	14%	17%
Disability	19%	17%	100%	14%	19%	22%	23%	21%	30%	16%	16%	4%	4%	22%	6%	12%	8%	0%	0%
Transportation	21%	14%	13%	100%	16%	31%	14%	14%	15%	8%	44%	4%	13%	26%	44%	0%	17%	14%	33%
Addictions	10%	19%	15%	14%	100%	28%	11%	18%	7%	20%	20%	25%	17%	26%	17%	18%	8%	0%	17%
Education	16%	14%	17%	26%	27%	100%	14%	14%	7%	4%	24%	13%	17%	9%	17%	12%	17%	0%	50%
Dignity	15%	10%	17%	12%	11%	14%	100%	7%	15%	16%	12%	17%	25%	13%	0%	12%	17%	14%	0%
Support networks	10%	13%	13%	9%	14%	11%	6%	100%	4%	28%	8%	13%	25%	30%	17%	6%	8%	14%	0%
Employment	6%	8%	17%	9%	5%	6%	11%	4%	100%	16%	8%	13%	25%	9%	0%	6%	0%	14%	0%
Threats to safety	10%	21%	9%	5%	14%	3%	11%	25%	15%	100%	20%	21%	21%	9%	17%	0%	17%	43%	0%
Recreation	13%	8%	9%	26%	14%	17%	9%	7%	7%	20%	100%	21%	0%	4%	17%	0%	0%	29%	17%
Community politics	8%	11%	2%	2%	16%	8%	11%	11%	11%	20%	20%	100%	8%	9%	11%	18%	8%	29%	17%
Cycle of poverty	7%	6%	2%	7%	11%	11%	17%	21%	22%	20%	0%	8%	100%	13%	6%	0%	17%	14%	0%
Health	11%	6%	11%	14%	16%	6%	9%	25%	7%	8%	4%	8%	13%	100%	17%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Isolation	7%	3%	2%	19%	8%	8%	0%	11%	0%	12%	12%	8%	4%	13%	100%	0%	8%	14%	17%
Mental health	6%	5%	4%	0%	8%	6%	6%	4%	4%	0%	0%	13%	0%	4%	0%	100%	0%	0%	17%
Justice system	2%	11%	2%	5%	3%	6%	6%	4%	0%	8%	0%	4%	8%	0%	6%	0%	100%	43%	17%
Racism	2%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	3%	4%	4%	12%	8%	8%	4%	0%	6%	0%	25%	100%	0%
Child care	3%	2%	0%	5%	3%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	4%	0%	0%	6%	6%	8%	0%	100%